



U.S. AIR FORCE

This Week in USAF and PACAF History **8 - 14 June 2009**



14 Jun 1912 After training at the Army Air School in the Philippines, Cpl. Vernon Burge became the Army's **first enlisted pilot**.

12 Jun 1918 The 96th Aero Squadron conducted the **first daylight bombing by an American unit** when it attacked enemy-held marshalling yards at Dommary-Baroncourt, France.

10 Jun 1943 The Royal Air Force and the Army Air Forces launched the **Combined Bomber Offensive** against Germany. Eighth Air Force struck enemy industrial targets by day, while the Royal Air Force attacked enemy cities by night. The around-the-clock bombing was designed to cripple and then destroy the Germans' ability and will to continue the war.

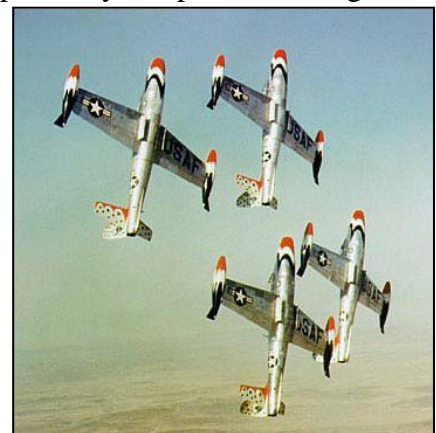
Three days later, in a raid on Kiel, Germany, Eighth Air Force lost 26 of 60 bombers, demonstrating the need for fighter escorts.

11 Jun 1943 After a month-long aerial bombardment that had commenced on May 8, some 11,000 Italian troops on the island of Pantelleria, between Italy and Tunisia, surrendered to the Allies without firing a shot. It was the **first large defended area to fall to air power**, and cleared the way for the Allies to move north from Africa to invade Sicily and Italy.

11 Jun 1948 **The USAF revised its aircraft designation system.** For example, "P" for pursuit changed to "F" for fighter, but the same model numbers were kept. Thus, the P-51 became the F-51, the P-80 became the F-80, etc. Previously, the "F" designation had been assigned to photo reconnaissance.

8 June 1953 At Luke Air Force Base, Arizona, the **USAF Thunderbirds**, officially designated the 3600th Air Demonstration Flight, **performed for the first time**. The team was named partly for the legendary Thunderbird of Native American folklore in the southwestern U.S., a creature held in awe and respect that shook the earth with the thunder of its great wings.

The first Thunderbird lead was Major Dick Catledge, a training squadron commander at Luke. Captains Bill and Buck Pattillo, a set of twins with experience from a USAFE demonstration team, were selected to fly left and right wing, respectively. Capt. Bob Kanaga, an instructor at Luke, was selected for the difficult position of slot, the position sandwiched between both wingmen and behind the leader. The spare pilot was Capt. Bob McCormick, another veteran of demonstration teams. 1st Lt. Aubry Brown served as maintenance officer for the team. Capt. Brown and his senior enlisted man, MSgt. Earl Young, selected 21 enlisted men to help maintain the team's aircraft. Capt. Bill Brock was the final officer selected for the team serving as the information services officer and team narrator. The first Thunderbird aircraft was the straight wing F-84G Thunderjet (see photo at right), considered well suited for aerobatic maneuvers.





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With the move to the F-100 Super Sabre in 1956, the Thunderbirds became the world's first supersonic aerial demonstration team. Although never a routine part of the Thunderbird show, the solo flew supersonic at the request of the air show sponsor. Eventually, the Federal Aviation Authority, a precursor to today's FAA, banned all supersonic flight at air shows.

11 Jun 1957 The **first U-2** high-altitude, long-range reconnaissance aircraft was delivered to the 4080th Strategic Reconnaissance Wing at Laughlin Air Force Base, Texas. The U-2 could fly 10-hour missions at exceptionally high altitudes at a top speed of 600 miles per hour. Photo at right.



9 June 1964 **First KC-135 Support for Vietnam Combat Operations.** Four KC-135s from Clark AB, Philippines, refueled eight F-100s from Da Nang AB, South Vietnam, on an attack against anti-aircraft batteries in North Laos. PACAF RF-101Cs and KB-50Js supported the strike.

13 Jun 1968 **DSCS Augmentation.** A Titan IIIC launch vehicle successfully placed in orbit eight communications satellites from Cape Kennedy, Florida, to augment the initial Defense Satellite Communications System.



10 June 1969 **Project Misty Bronco.** Beginning in April, Misty Bronco tested the effectiveness of armed OV-10s providing an immediate USAF strike presence readily available to ground forces. The concept was deemed successful, and arming of all OV-10s was authorized on 10 June. (See photo of OV-10, left).

14 June 1969 **Wild Weasel IV.** PACAF's first F-4C Wild Weasel aircraft arrived at Yokota Air Base and was assigned to the 347 TFW in March. By June, 14 Wild Weasels were in Japan at Yokota and Misawa.



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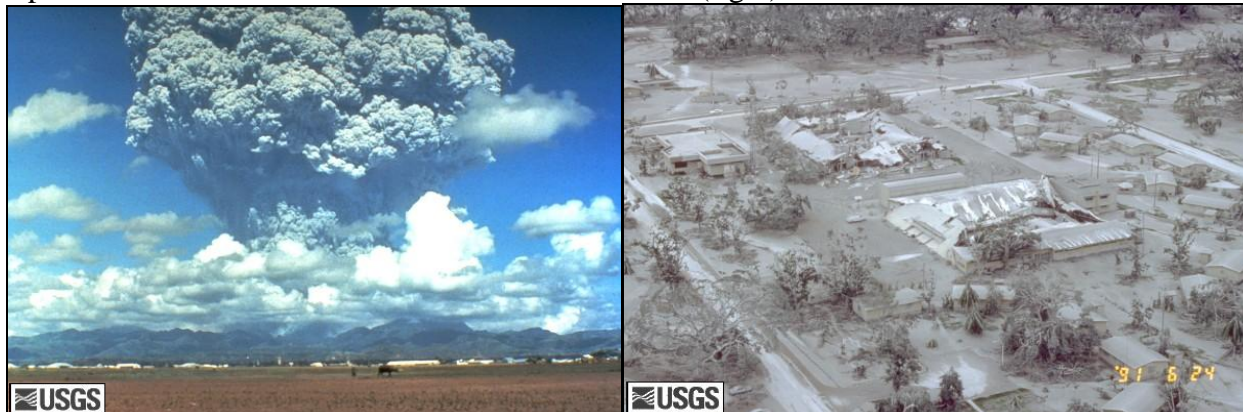
12 Jun 1970 A USAF K-30, one of the largest reconnaissance cameras, retired to the Air Force Museum after more than 20 years in service. The camera measured 3' x 4.5' x 5', weighed 665 pounds, and used a 100-inch focal length optical system.

15 June 1970 The final **Blind Bat flare sortie** was flown by a C-130 over the Barrel Roll area of Laos. The primary role of the Blind Bat mission was to find, illuminate, and direct air strikes against North Vietnamese truck convoys, as well as river traffic (sampans), AAA sites, river fords, bridges and POL sites. The C-130As returned to Naha Air Base. Originally, the phrase Blind Bat was just the call sign for C-130s on forward air controller/flareship duty over southern Laos. Soon, it came to have a wider meaning, denoting an entire mission. By early 1966, all C-130 flareship operations in-theater went by the shorthand name Blind Bat. (Blind Bat patch at right.)



9 Jun 1974 The **Northrop YF-17 prototype aircraft** made its first flight at Edwards Air Force Base, California. Although the YF-16 was selected over the YF-17 as the Air Force's newest fighter aircraft, the YF-17 became the **progenitor of the Navy's F-18 Hornet**.

8 June – 2 July 1991 The **eruption of Mount Pinatubo** in the Philippines buried Clark Air Base and two other U.S. military installations with volcanic ash, forcing the Air Force to evacuate some 15,000 people to Guam and the United States. **FIERY VIGIL** became the largest evacuation operation since the fall of South Vietnam in 1975. Clark Air Base, the oldest and largest USAF overseas base, closed permanently. The photos below show the eruption (left) and a part of Clark Air Base some weeks after the ash fall (right).



14 June 1993 **The first C-17 Globemaster III** arrived at its operational wing, the 437th Airlift Wing at Charleston Air Force Base, South Carolina. Capable of delivering outsized cargo to a tactical environment, the Globemaster III increased the Air Force's ability to airlift to relatively small airfields, eliminating the need to shift cargo from larger to smaller transports.



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11 Jun 1996 **JSTARS**. ACC acquired its first E-8 Joint Surveillance Target Attack Radar System aircraft. The E-8, capable of providing detailed radar information on ground targets, had been tested during its development in Operations DESERT STORM and JOINT ENDEAVOR. Photo at left.

9 Jun 1997 **Expeditionary Air Force Unit Concept**. During Exercise CENTRAL ENTERPRISE (9-20 June), two B-1B bomber units became one force at a forward operating location—RAF Fairford, England. The 7th Bomb Wing from Dyess AFB and the 28th Bomb Wing from Ellsworth AFB, along with 350 people, formed the 7th Expeditionary Bomb Group.

10 Jun 1999 **Operation ALLIED FORCE**. NATO suspended air strikes against Yugoslavia after its President agreed in writing to withdraw Serb forces from Kosovo, allow their replacement with multinational peacekeeping forces, and allow the return of hundreds of thousands of ethnic Albanians to that province. Noted military historian John Keegan claimed that ALLIED FORCE was the first war in history won by air power alone. In the photo below is an F-117, one of the aircraft employed in the operation.

